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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [CB](#)
SUBJECT: THAKSIN RETURNS FOR ROUND TWO

REF: PHNOM PENH 831

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

¶1. (SBU) Former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra arrived via private jet on December 13 for his second visit to Phnom Penh since his appointment as Economic Advisor to the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) (reftel). His itinerary began with a visit to Prey Sar prison in Phnom Penh to meet the Thai engineer convicted of spying for passing the former Prime Minister's flight information to the Thai embassy during his last visit in November. On December 11, King Norodom Sihamoni pardoned the engineer, Sivarak Chutipong, which Thaksin reportedly attributed to the "efforts of the Puea Thai party." Minister of Information Khieu Kanharith added a small dig at the Thais when announcing the pardon, calling it a "humanitarian act" to free Sivarak, who had been "used" by a Thai government that refused to take responsibility for his actions. Hun Sen marked Sivarak's release with a ceremony at his residence on December 14; Thaksin arrived at the PM's residence shortly after the ceremony for a private meeting.

¶2. (SBU) Most observers believe that this latest visit is merely a continuation of Hun Sen and Thaksin using each other for mutual gain. Maintaining a friendship with Thaksin allows Hun Sen to continue to goad Thai PM Abhsit Vejjajiva, with the added benefit of gaining an advisor in economic growth and trade, areas in which Cambodia is struggling. Meanwhile, Thaksin is clearly taking advantage of his relationship with Hun Sen and Cambodia's close proximity to maintain his visibility, meet with his supporters, and assess the political climate in Thailand.

¶3. (SBU) While the timing of the visit to coincide with Sivarak's release appears to be an attempt to credit Thaksin and the Puea Thai party with this intervention, Thaksin does seem to be making some effort to provide advice to officials on issues related to economic development. Thaksin is reportedly scheduled to deliver a lecture at the Ministry of Economy and Finance December 15. An official at the Ministry of Tourism confirmed that the RGC was organizing workshops on agriculture, tourism, trade, and investment for director of department-level government officials. According to an official at the Ministry of Commerce, Thaksin plans to meet December 16 with the Minister of Commerce and officials at the Council for the Development of Cambodia to discuss improvements to the investment climate in Cambodia.

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